

Amable Oakes

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF ENGLISHMEN IN
THE COLONIES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF QUEBEC,

BEFORE THE

ST. GEORGE'S SOCIETY

OF THAT CITY,

On the 23d April, 1847,

BY

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LORD BISHOP OF MONTREAL.

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Deut. iv. 5, 6.—Behold I have taught you statutes and judgments even as the Lord commanded me ; that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them : for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

THERE are many instances in the Old Testament of a solemn charge given to the Israelites, relating to the observance of specific injunctions and peculiar institutions imposed upon that people, but obviously susceptible of a much more comprehensive application. The great features, indeed, of the moral law, and certain fundamental points in the Mosaic system, of faith and homage towards God, are things of perpetual and unchangeable obligation among mankind ; and there are many important principles derived from that system which are found transfused into the polity and incorporated with the institutions of christian lands. But independently of such considerations as these, the charge which is given to the people of Israel, respecting their own particular affairs, is often so framed in the wisdom of God,—and we may take the passage which I have now brought before you, as an example in point—that we can readily adapt it to a case nearer home and draw instruction from it, which is immediately profitable for ourselves.

My brethren, let us pray the God of all grace that, in the contemplation of this passage from his holy word, we may lay to heart the lessons which it carries—for we are solemnly met together in his house, as Englishmen and as Christians, marking ourselves as both to the eye of the world, with the duties which lie upon us in both capacities, by the observances of this day :—As *English-*

men by the celebration, in *any* shape, of the anniversary—as *Christians* by the very fact of our being here within these walls, where, if we do not come as Christians, as men desiring to *worship the father in spirit and in truth*, seeking mercy from him, relying for the pardon of their sins and the salvation of their souls upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and him alone, and recognizing the principle that *the life which they live in the flesh*, they must *live by the faith of the Son of God*,*—if we do not come thus, we have manifestly no business to come at all, and can expect no greeting from the master of the house but the question, *Who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?*† or the similar repudiation of our persons, and rejection of our approaches which is found in another place, *Are ye come to enquire of me? As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be enquired of by you.*‡

God, therefore, must be present to our souls in the celebration of this day,—God and our responsibilities to God,—our collective and our individual responsibilities,—for let us remember that whatever effect is to be produced, in whatever way, by an *Association*, that Association is *made up of parts*; and the responsibility which lies upon the *whole* in carrying out the objects for which the Association is constituted, lies diffused to their very extremities over the *parts*. *For the body*, as the Apostle says of the christian brotherhood, *is not one member but many*;§ and, as he there shews, each member must sustain the share assigned to it, in the functions of that body, in order to the soundness and efficient operation of the whole.

* Gal. ii. 20.

† Is. i. 12.

‡ Ezek. xx. 3.

§ 1. Cor. xii. 14.

The Association, then, with which we have here to deal is, together with the corresponding Associations in our other cities, designed to be a representation, before the world, of the English interest in the Colony,—not as invidiously separating that interest from the interests of our fellow subjects of other races within the land,—not with the object of perpetuating any national feeling of jealousy relatively to any other quarter whatever, or retarding the social amalgamation of the community in all the privileges of British subjects, the offices of charity and good-will, and the enterprises of public improvement,—far otherwise than this, it is, I am sure, the heart-felt desire of the members, may I not say one and all?—to obliterate all such use of national distinctions as can obstruct the harmony or the prosperity of the country, and (without compromising an iota of principle) to mix with the circulation of every enlarged and generous sentiment, the current of English blood which flows in their veins,—but they desire to cherish those recollections of the land of their fathers which, in themselves naturally dear to their bosoms, are also bound up with thoughts of blessing to mankind : there are English feelings, English principles, English institutions, English energies, which Englishmen, impelled by the very action within them of a general philanthropy, desire to carry over the world ; and it is the part assigned to them by Providence to plant these happy productions of their native soil in all those vast and widely severed regions of the globe, which own the sway of their empire and bow to the sceptre of their Queen. And upon all this we are impressing its proper *religious* character by interweaving with the observances of the day, this our dutiful attendance in the house of prayer. We unfurl, as it were, the standard of England, and in all humility and thankfulness of heart, we stamp upon it the sacred emblem of the cross.

In this serious and exalted view, therefore, of the subject, let each individual member of the society, learn to regard himself as one who is called upon to exhibit a *consistency throughout*, in his course of action. He is called upon to recommend his own country and her institutions, which make his boast, by his own example ; by the good effects, visible in his own character, deportment, habits and social efficiency in his station, of the origin by which he is marked (so far as that can have influenced his opportunities of doing good in his generation,) and of the system of things to which he owns an hereditary attachment. And in all this, he is to approve himself to the eye of God, before whom he is answerable precisely in proportion to his advantages. If he has eminently possessed means of enjoying the light of civilization, the light of political freedom, the light of moral, intellectual and scientific advancement, and above all, the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he must take heed to *let his light so shine before men, that they may see his good works, and glorify his father which is in heaven.** *Unto whomsoever much is given of him, shall be much required.*† England pours her sons over the world : they seat themselves among the luxuries of the tropics—they lay under tribute the snowy forests of Canada—they rifle the gorgeous treasures of the distant east—they ransack inhospitable regions, piercing far within the polar circle, to bring off the shaggy spoils of the wilderness—they master the obstacles, as they turn to account the resources of nature, and seem in a manner as if they would make an England of half the world, and, by the modern discoveries and improvements whether in the facilities of intercourse and communication or the rapid conveyance of intelligence, would lead

* Math. v. 16.

† Luke xii. 48.

the way in bringing all the world together ;—and wherever they go, wherever they establish themselves, they cover the land with the monuments of their industry, enterprise and skill. And while *England* thus pours her sons over the world, *Christian England* reminds them of the commission, in its full extent, which they bear. Their privileges are received from the hand of God : it is by his free favor, not by any claim which they can make good upon Him, that they have been distinguished among the people of the earth, and to His glory and the good of their fellow-creatures, all these privileges are made capable of ministering,—*Christian England*, therefore, says to them in all their migrations and with reference to all the blessings of every kind which they have inherited, *Behold I have taught you statutes and judgments even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it : Keep, therefore, and do them : cherish your principles ; act up to your advantages—for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.*

Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. My brethren, you do see, I persuade myself, that it is this character of our country, that every individual who enrolls himself a Member of the National Society of Englishmen in the Colony, becomes engaged to sustain in his own person, before God and the world. He puts himself forward, he undertakes, to represent within his particular sphere, a great and enlightened Christian country—a country eminently conspicuous as *a city set on a hill which cannot be hid,** and called to a

* Math. v. 14.

task of unequalled importance and magnitude upon earth. I do not mean that any adventitious duties of the nature here under consideration, can possibly be regarded as *higher* than his original duty as a Christian:—it can hardly be necessary to disclaim such a supposition as that—but I mean that, superadded to such original duty, he assumes, (as men do in a multitude of other cases,) duties springing from a new position and that he contracts new obligations, accordingly:—I mean that he is to regard himself, if so familiar an expression may be allowed to pass, as a *sample* to the world of *what an Englishman ought to be*, or if that simple description do not please, an impersonation of all that is moulded in the human character by means of the peculiar influences of Christian England, when acting in a favorable way, upon their subject; and it would be a very low and inadequate, we might call it a degenerate view of his affiliation to such a society, to treat it as a mere matter of hearty and honest good-fellowship among the sons of old England, with a free hand to help a countryman in distress.—It must not stop there.

Let us go back a little to a more general view of the subject, that we may return with the greater advantage to our point.

We profess to be followers of the Christian Religion. We carry that name, formed from the name of the *anointed* * Son of God, which was first given to his disciples at Antioch,† and has spread thence over that portion of the world which from the same etymology, is called *Christendom*. We revolve in that system, dim and minute specs though we may individually be, in the

* Most readers perhaps are aware that this is the signification of the word *Christ*, which is of Greek formation, as it is also the signification of the Hebrew word *Messiah*.

† Acts xi. 20.

vastness of our firmament, which gives us a denomination and a character distinct from that of the Pagan, the Mussulman and the Jew. Let us look then at Christianity in a *national* point of view, i. e. as it affects masses and communities of men,—and consider, very briefly, the changes which it has wrought and is destined yet to work among mankind. And here will it be necessary to guard against the error which has manifested itself with sufficient frequency in such enquiries,—the error of charging upon Christianity, the delinquencies of men who happen to be called Christians without knowing any thing of the spirit of their faith, or the acts which, perhaps in the very name and professedly for the cause of that holy religion, have been perpetrated in direct and flagrant violation of its whole object in the world? We need not, I hope, say much upon this point. The Founder of the system, who knew the depths of human corruption and the prevalent disposition of fallen nature to love darkness rather than light,—fore-saw the consequent perversions of the Gospel by false disciples, and forewarned his adherents that *offences must, of necessity, come*—denouncing *woe* at the same time,—a woe impending over the head of every inconsistent professor of Christianity—*against that man by whom the offence should come* *; and the same sacred voice which thus addresses itself to genuine disciples, *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you*, † asks the question, with reference to the actual working of his religion in an evil world, *Suppose ye that I am come to send peace upon earth?* and supplies also the answer, *I tell you nay but rather division.* ‡

* Luke xvii. 1.

† John xiv. 27.

‡ Luke xii. 51.

And yet, my brethren, taking all this into our account, what a change, what a blessed change has Christianity operated in the world ! Compare together the state of the world before and since the introduction of Christianity,—compare the countries,—I will not point to the barbarous or semi-barbarous countries where Satan reigns supreme as well in the ruder debasement, generally, of the species, as in the grossness of a disgusting and revolting idolatry,—but compare with Christian countries, the mighty, the powerful, the luxurious, the magnificent, the polished, and as far as the wisdom of man is concerned, the wise and enlightened nations of the world,—take especially the two great examples of ancient Greece and Rome,—with their *gods many and lords many*,* what did they learn from them ?—What lessons were carried to their hearts, what effect was produced upon their lives, from the contemplation of these imaginary deities and the practice of those rites with which they honored them ?—What lessons *could* be carried, what effects *could* follow from a mythology and a worship which presented gods and goddesses invested, in the popular belief, with attributes of crime disgraceful to human nature, in fact, in some instances, too filthy to be named,—and supposed to be propitiated by religious solemnities replete with cruelty, with obscenity and frantic excess † ?—The fruits in the state

* 1 Cor. viii. 5.

† Particular examples of each of these characteristics may be found in the practices embodied respectively in the worship of Diana, Venus and Bacchus. A great Roman Satirist has treated as something wonderful, the infatuated creed and worship of the Egyptians, (another ancient nation who at one time led the way in learning, and exhibited a highly advanced state of the arts of life,) and, after asking the question

*Quis nescit, Volusi Bithynice, qualia demens
Ægyptus portentosa colat ?* (Juv. Sat. xv. v. 1.)

and proceeding to enumerate several of examples of degrading objects of

of public sentiment and manners, were precisely what were to be looked for from such a religion :—these fruits are pictured by the hand of St. Paul, specially in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans :—it is an appalling picture—but monuments and records in abundance have been left to us by the people themselves whom he describes, to testify to its exact fidelity and truth. If we examine the details of their social and domestic life—if we look into their literature, as a whole, beautiful and exquisite as it is when considered apart from its moral character and tendency,—if we observe the principles upon which they waged, and the manner in which they conducted their wars with other nations—if, again, we notice the negative operation of their religion, if we ask for their public charities, for their beneficent foundations, for their plans to mitigate the ills and to meliorate the moral condition of poor outcast beings, of degraded classes, or oppressed races among mankind,—for the efforts and sacrifices of their self-

worship, and proofs of a monstrous superstition, he comments upon the strangeness of adoring dogs, the animals of chase, and paying no veneration to the huntress Deity herself.

Oppida tota canem venerantur nemo Dianam.

It must, however, be a great question with those who are acquainted with all the complex and distorted fables of which Diana, under her several aspects, was the subject, and who remember that among the rites by which this Deity was propitiated, was the practice of whipping boys to death, what the Egyptians, (if, in point of fact, they had been wholly ignorant of the worship of Diana,) would have gained by exchanging their own superstitions for those of heathen Rome. Juvenal, however, is suspected of not having had a very sincere respect for the latter.

A remarkable and instructive lesson was conveyed, in the plagues of Egypt, with reference to the received superstitions of that country. It will be found that they served to fulfil, in a signal and pointed manner, the denunciation of the Almighty. Ex. xii. 12. *Also upon the Gods of Egypt will I execute judgment.* See *Bryant's Egyptian Plagues*,—a work in which this feature of the divine proceedings in the memorable history here noticed, is treated at large, and with much learning.

denying zeal, to bind up the broken hearted and to carry such comfort and light as was in their power, to those who were involved in misery and gloom,—and if we find nothing whatever of all this—not a trace of it to be seen—and nothing in the place of it but a cold and supercilious philosophy or a vain-glorious and boastful patriotism, resting for its real basis upon individual and selfish pride—and *then* if we turn and look at the fruits of the religion of Jesus,—mixed as the wheat is and will be, with the tares, and imperfect in many seasons and in many places as is the development of the wheat itself,—*then*, my brethren, we shall come to our conclusion that *this counsel or this work is not of men*, and we shall feel, if we rightly apply our conclusion, the accountability of our position, *lest haply*, in the very possession of these advantages, we be *found* after all *to fight against God* *—for we shall remember the words of the Redeemer himself, which are here strictly in point, *He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth*.†

Look again, for one moment, at the disciples of Mahomet, with all their stern rejection of idolatry, and their punctilious observances in public devotion—take only one example of the fruits of the system, as contrasted with those of Christianity—consider the conditions of their women—kept as mere property, by scores or by hundreds, for the base pleasure of the man, exactly as he would keep a stud of hunters or a pack of hounds, and mercilessly put, in the mass, to some shocking death by their owner,—(of which there have been recent instances within the verge of Christendom, and where the Turks might be supposed to have been humanized in some points by their contact with Christians,)—for

* Acts v. 39.

† Math. xii. 30.

no other reason than that, without their having been parties to it themselves, they have been placed in circumstances which have involved the fact or simply brought the suspicion of a taint upon their persons.* And all this, be it observed, without any shock given to the received sentiments of the community or any violence done to the received principles of religion.

This is the way in which the world goes, without the checks, without the softening as well as purifying influences of Christianity. By the mercy of God, this Christianity, this great changing power both in the case of the community and of the individual, has come down to us. It was planted in the British Isles, long before their spiritual subjugation to the See of Rome, in the same form in which it subsists in England at this day, as the National Church : (in fact that Church is still one and

* A remarkable and horrible example of this kind is recorded by Lammartine in his *Souvenirs, &c., pendant un voyage en Orient*, in the case of an Emir whose palace and fortress were taken possession of by his rebellious guards, while he was fighting in another part of the country, with his brother. In another instance, for which I have not the means at present, of indicating my authority, a bevy of these females who had been captured and speedily ransomed from their captors by a British Ship of war, were restored to their owner, with the pledge of British honor, that their persons had been scrupulously guarded from all approach to familiarity and screened even from observation. The great man courteously thanked the officers, paid the ransom in full, and then caused all the unfortunate women to be tied up in sacks, and thrown into the sea. I give these particulars from memory. The treatment of the women in the first mentioned instance, was far worse.

Perhaps if the accomplished author of *Ism leaves* had given a little consideration to occurrences of this nature, as connected with the system of the hareem, it might have served to qualify his commendation of eastern manners in this behalf. See Quarterly Review, No. cxlix. Art. The Author of the *Crescent and the Cross* will be seen to have formed a very different estimate of the practice in question,

the same thing that it was then.)* It has passed through many struggles ; it has been exposed to the action of many conflicting elements in the land of our fathers, and has experienced alternations or other changes of dominant parties, political and religions,—in all which there has been, as a necessary accompaniment of human agency, much that has scandalized the faith and much mixture of motives and doings on either side, which it is painful to contemplate,—but all, by the over-ruling hand of God, has resulted, upon the whole, in what is good, and fervently may we bless his holy name that we have been brought up to the point where we now stand. I will not say securely—for we have many sins and much that we ought to amend—we may yet provoke God to *remove our candlestick out of its place*,† and to lay in the dust our cherished and vaunted institutions : but in the meantime, Englishmen, in the manner which I have already endeavoured to indicate, have the task confided to them from above, of carrying the elevated principles of their country over the world, and in the entire range of the Colonial territories of the empire, east and west, and north and south, to *keep and do them—for this is their wisdom and their understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.* Alas ! how little have we Englishmen, in too many instances, appeared sensible of what we owe, in

* It is well known that the British Church was represented by a delegation of Bishops at the Council of Arles, A. D. 314, and that the British Clergy strenuously resisted the claims made on behalf of Rome by the Missionary monk Augustine, A. D. 597. A great mass of authentic and curious information upon this whole question, will be found in a work upon the Origin and independence of the Primitive Church of the British Isles, by the late learned Dr. W. Hales, of Killeandra.

† Rev. ii. 5

this behalf, to God and to mankind ! How little have we considered the solemn duty which lies upon us, creditably to uphold our Religion and all our institutions in the eyes of the population, of whatever faith or features or blood, where we have cast in our lot ! How little have we remembered the necessity of our *having a good report of them which are without—providing things honest in the sight of all men—giving none offence neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God—having our conversation honest among the Gentiles, or any other parties discriminated by marks of external separation from ourselves,—and in a manner compelling them, if their prejudices would prompt them to speak against us as evil-doers, yet by our good works which they shall behold, to glorify God in the day of visitation !** How little has it been felt or understood that besides our strictly personal obligations to holiness of life, we have here a separate and thus a double responsibility to exhibit a pattern before the world of all the *fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God,* and giving all diligence, to add to our faith virtue (the original word imports a manly firmness of religious character,) and to virtue knowledge ; (knowledge of spiritual things,) and to knowledge temperance ; and to temperance patience ; and to patience Godliness ; and to Godliness, brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness, charity.†*

We in this particular colony, occupy the soil, the whole of which, some three centuries ago, was a *waste howling wilderness,†* inhabited only by heathen savages and the wild beasts, whom they slew for their subsistence

* 1 Pim. iii. 7. Rom. xii. 17. i. Cor. x. 32. 1 Pit. ii. 12.

† 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7.

‡ Deut. xxxii. 10.

and their clothing, with not much other evidence to mark by any very wide interval, the superiority of man. They, however, with many a cry sent to heaven against Europeans, which will be remembered at the last account, have dwindled into insignificance, and the remains of them, at this day, have in a great measure, ceased to be heathens :—partly under Romish, and partly under Protestant auspices, they have been brought to make, in some shape, a profession of the Christian Religion. We have come in to mix ourselves with those who were the intermediate lords of the territory, and we have partially modified their institutions and engrafted our British principles upon them. We have had further accessions of population from different parts of Europe and America, and we form our part of a people who may correctly be described as made up of heterogeneous materials. God Almighty grant that we and others too with us, may work as a good leaven in the mass, and that our whole example and influence and the characteristic proceedings, in particular, of this our distinctive National Association, may be found in harmony and keeping with the views of duty which I have here endeavoured to exhibit! And God Almighty be praised that the people of England and the Church of England at home and abroad, are in truth becoming daily more alive to the weight of their responsibilities in this behalf.

There is one leading object of the Christian religion, which our Society has not forgotten, which forms, indeed, a primary feature of its designs, and for aiding in the continued prosecution of which, the bounty of this congregation is now solicited,—the object of affording relief to human misery. By the *general principles of Christianity*, the Members of the St. George's Society are well aware that they are called upon, according to their ability, and opportunity, to sooth the sufferings and to

alleviate the wants of all who belong to the family of man. *As Members of that particular Society*, constituted for certain *special objects*, and comprehending the purposes of beneficence to *distressed Englishmen*,—with no violation, no dereliction, of the broad and diffusive principles of Charity, to which they respond in other ways,—they have opened the door to claimants who have the plea of *countrymen*, and who in many instances perhaps, as forlorn and downcast strangers, in unexpected difficulty and unwonted distress, look for some peculiar plea to encourage their hearts, before they can give utterance to an application for relief. The funds have always been very carefully and very judiciously managed—(in fact the Society has been quite an example in this point)—and, within the past year, the sum of about £130 has been expended in Charity,—the number of cases relieved having been fifty-six.—The decent widow left helpless, with her children, in a land of strangers; the poor settler in the woods wanting seed to repair the failure of his crop; the languid and ill-recovered sufferer from sickness, crawling from hospital to seek a shelter where he may; the disabled mariner who has been shipwrecked upon the desolate shore of the Gulph and left with limbs to be sacrificed, in that exposure, to the rigours of Canadian frost,—these form part of the description of cases for which the appeal is made to you to day. The calls upon us are many—there are constant and uniform, and there are extraordinary calls—signal, awful, wide-spread visitations from the hand of God, within the colony and out of it, prompt a cry to us for help—but far from pleading exemption or seeking excuse from the frequent repetition of these calls,—let us rather think that God schools us to the habit of giving and the habit of abridging our own indulgences that we may not abridge ourselves in the *privilege* of giving. The more we see and know of human wants

and sufferings, the more we should cultivate the familiar exercise and manifest the ready fruits of our sympathy. We ought, according to an Apostolic charge read to us in the second lesson of this morning,—*to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.** The words of the Lord Jesus have some title to our remembrance and some claim upon our hearts :—they are the words of one who, besides having divine authority to command his creatures, set us an example of love and beneficence exercised towards ourselves, which never can be equalled, but which always must be imitated : *One who though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich.†* One who loved us and gave HIMSELF for us.‡ And shall we refuse to give our hearts to him ?—Or shall we grudge what we give to sufferers for his sake ?—No—never—never. Only let us remember his gracious and blessed words, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto ME,§*—and his encouraging assurance to those who can give but little beyond their prayers, that *a cup of cold water given in his name and for his sake, shall in no wise lose its reward. ||*

* Acts xx. 35.

† 2 Cor. viii. 9.

‡ Gal. ii. 20.

§ Math. xxv. 40.

|| Math. x. 42.

ERRATA.

Page 14, fifth line, *for* religions, *read* religious.

Page 15, foot-note, *for* 1 Pim. *read* 1 Tim. and *for* 1 Pit. *read* 1 Pet.

Page 16, eleventh line, *for* intermidiate, *read* intermediate.